



JUNE 2013

Alphabets and Ice Cream

Claes Oldenburg

Alphabet in the form of a Good Humor Bar



VISIT THE BMA
and look for images
and sculptures of
food.

Claes Oldenburg (American, born Sweden, 1929). Detail, *Alphabet in the form of a Good Humor Bar*. 1970. Offset color lithograph. 29 x 20 inches. The Baltimore Museum of Art: Gift of Frances and George Alderson, Baltimore, in Honor of their Nieces and Nephews of the Kosnik, Ross, Condrón, Grace, Shade and Robinson Families, BMA 2001.25. ©Claes Oldenburg



To comment or register
for Art-To-Go, email
Landre@artbma.org

For visitor information:
artbma.org

Alphabet ice cream! Have you ever heard of such a thing? The inside of this ice cream bar is plain old vanilla, but the outside is made of chunky pink letters that look as if they've been inflated like balloons. The alphabet starts with a partly-melted and slightly bluish letter A in the corner where someone has already taken a bite. The rest of the letters follow along in bumpy rows all the way to Z. Crammed together, with no space to spare, the letters fit in as best they can, like people packed into a crowded bus. Have you noticed that four letters of this alphabet are missing?

You'll never find this kind of ice cream bar in the freezer compartment of a Good Humor ice cream truck, but that didn't stop artist Claes Oldenburg from playing around with the idea. Some years earlier, he had drawn a picture of a colossal chocolate-covered ice cream bar turned upside-down amidst New York City skyscrapers, with its wooden stick reaching way up into the clouds. Of course such a thing was completely impossible, but Oldenburg enjoyed making it happen, if only on paper.

Oldenburg was first and foremost a sculptor, so it wasn't long before he decided to build his ice cream bars in three dimensions. First he made a soft cloth version out of 26 stuffed pillows, each in the shape of a letter. Then came a bar in painted plaster followed by a fiberglass popsicle eight feet tall. Oldenburg never pretended that any of his ice cream bars would taste delicious, but he was quite sure they would make people look twice and smile.

To see many versions of Oldenburg's ice cream bars, Google "oldenburg good humor" and click on the Images tab.

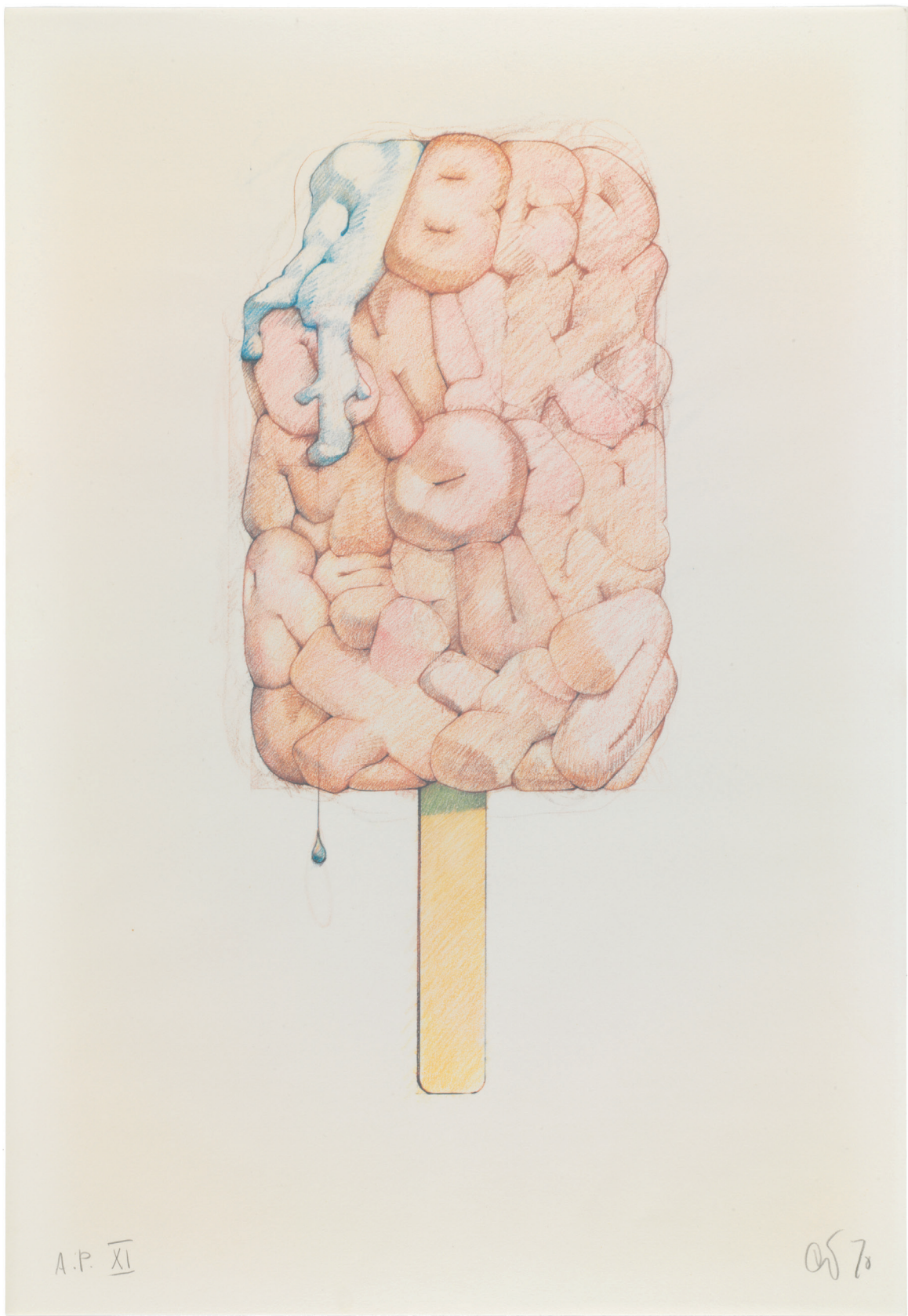
CHALLENGE FOR STUDENTS

Compare the arrangement and relationship of the letters on Oldenburg's ice cream bar with the letters in a bowl of alphabet soup. (bit.ly/ZHW3Db or Google "alphabet soup images.")

Discuss whether Oldenburg's *Alphabet in the form of a Good Humor Bar* is a successful *hybrid* of two different ideas. (*Hybrid* means "a thing made by combining two or more dissimilar elements.")

Create a drawing of a familiar object in which you change its form, size, material, or surroundings so that it takes viewers by surprise.

PRINT THE IMAGE ON PAGE 2 FOR YOUR STUDENTS.



Claes Oldenburg. *Alphabet in the form of a Good Humor Bar.*

1970. Offset color lithograph. 29 x 20 inches. The Baltimore Museum of Art: Gift of Frances and George Alderson, Baltimore, in Honor of their Nieces and Nephews of the Kosnik, Ross, Condrón, Grace, Shade and Robinson Families, BMA 2001.25. ©Claes Oldenburg